

National Gazette

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

(Registered at the General Post Office, Port Moresby, for transmission by post as a Qualified Publication)

No. G619]

PORT MORESBY, FRIDAY, 5th AUGUST

[2022

THE NATIONAL MUD CRAB FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ACT, 1998 (AS AMMENDED)

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THE NATIONAL MUD CRAB FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

BACKGROUND

Resource

Mud crabs also commonly known as mangrove crabs are found in mangrove and estuarine habitats throughout the maritime provinces of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Mud crabs belong to the family Portunidae and genus *Scylla* and there are four species to be found in PNG. These are *S. serrata*, *S. paramamosain*, *S. olivacea* and *S. tranquabarica*.

Biology and Ecology

The four species of mud crabs found in PNG have similar features and can be difficult to separate into individual species. The reproductive cycle and the size at first sexual maturity are very similar across the four species, with mud crabs maturing between 1.5 to 2 years (with a corresponding carapace width of 9 to 11 cm).

Spawning for mud crabs in PNG appears to be all year round with a peak in spawning from late May to the end of September. Mud crabs have a relatively short larval cycle of two to three weeks in the planktonic stage before they settle after being transported on tides and currents. To spawn, mud crabs are known to migrate offshore as much as 50 kilometres and to depths of 300 meters. Mating takes place when the female's carapace is soft, and within 48 hours following a moult.

The current knowledge on mud crabs' stocks in PNG is mainly based on independent and dependent fisheries data, involving stock assessments, catch monitoring and socio-economic studies. Significant research on mud crabs in PNG was conducted in the 1980s-1990s and more recently from 2017 onwards. However, in order to make better decisions on the sustainable management of the mud crab fishery, there is still a need to conduct further studies on the biology and ecology of each species.

Fishery

There is no industrial harvesting of mud crabs. However, mud crabs have been recorded as by-catch in the Gulf of Papua Prawn fishery. The mud crab fishery in PNG is therefore an artisanal fishery with tens of thousands of fishers collecting mud crabs for subsistence, trade and for sale.

Mud crabs are caught by a variety of methods including by hand, pulled from holes using a forked stick, baited traps or nets, and gillnets. Mud crabs are generally marketed as live animals but can also be frozen or cooked. Mud crabs are kept alive using various storage facilities. They are either packed in wet bags, typically with mangrove leaves or wet copra sacks, or aerated bags for longer periods, or maybe kept in oxygenated containers.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued***Status of Stocks**

The National Fisheries Authority (NFA) conducts stock assessment surveys annually since 2017 in the maritime provinces of PNG that are known to harvest or trade mud crabs. The total biomass for mud crab stocks is calculated using a formula that involves recorded mud crab density per hectare, as well as mean mud crab weight for all mud crabs sampled from each hectare and then extrapolated using the known mangrove area for that locality (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of the mud crab stock assessment results for 2021-2022.

Province	Mangrove Area Area (ha)	Crab Per Hectare	Mean Crab Weight (kg)	Total Estimated Population Biomass (Tonnes)
Western	117,623	3.10	0.367	134
Gulf	260,822	17.42	0.268	1222
Central	59,029	8.86	0.470	246
Milne Bay	44,606	3.43	0.497	76
New Ireland	18,933	3.6	0.612	42
Manus	7404	8.59	0.333	21
West New Britain	14509	9.06	0.323	11
East New Britain	2788	5.07	0.473	7
Morobe	3590	11.93	0.278	12
Madang	812	11.96	0.277	3
Autonomous Region of Bougainville	7959	6.38	0.403	20
East Sepik	19872	11.90	0.279	66
West Sepik	783	11.90	0.279	3
Oro	16137	6.36	0.469	48

Export and Marketing

Mud crab have been exported from PNG since 1994, albeit in small volumes. Since 2015, mud crabs' exports have exponentially grown (Figure 1). Mud crab exports peaked in 2019 with 807 tonnes with a decline in the following years, in part due to the restricted movements imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*

Export Quantity in (KG) from 1992-2021

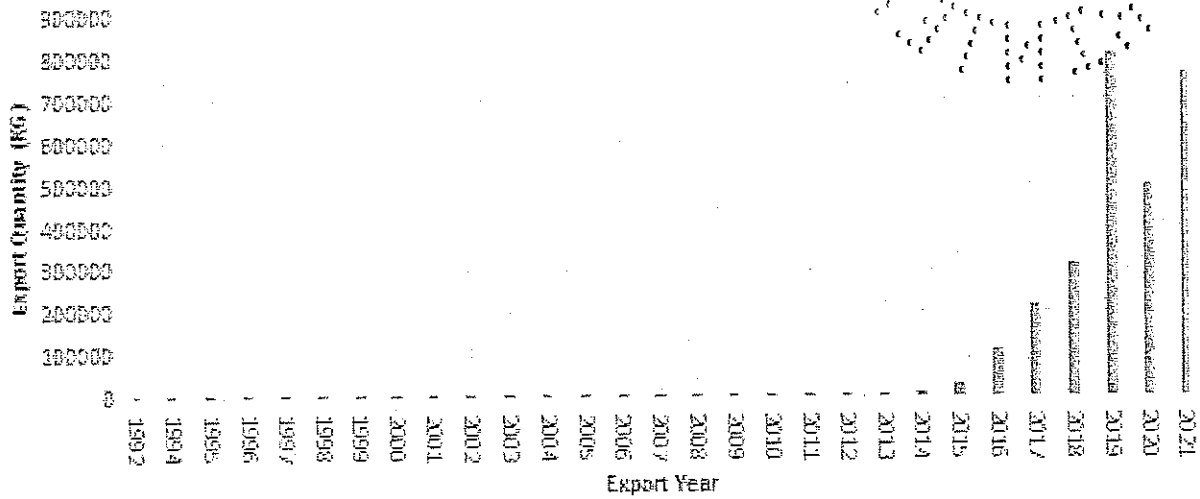


Figure 1: Official NFA mud crab export quantity from 1992-2021.

ENVIRONMENT IMPACTS

There are no known environmental impacts from harvesting mud crabs except for the breaking of mangroves in the removal process. Mud crabs are also an important agent in the cycling of nutrients in estuarine environments. The burrows of mud crabs also introduce oxygen into the sediments, therefore affecting the nutrient cycle in estuarine areas and subsequently the amount of primary production. As scavengers they feed on slow moving animals and sedentary animals such as molluscs, smaller crabs, worms. Mud crabs also feed on plant materials. This feeding behaviour plays a role in the production of particle sizes of the mangrove mud as well as helping to keep the muddy bottom clean.

If mud crabs are being held for fattening or ranching purposes, there is also the risk of introducing diseases, bacteria and other pathogens to new mud crab populations in other mangrove habitats. Subsequently, precautions are required to be taken to ensure that local populations of mud crabs are always protected.

To assist with ensuring mud crabs populations are protected, Section 2 for Growing and Harvest Areas under the PNG National Standard for Fish and Fishery Product 2019, states that NFA will have in place a Monitoring Plan for monitoring of environmental contaminants. Subsequently, mud crabs shall not be harvested from areas where the presence of potentially harmful agents such as pathogens, bacteria, bio-toxins and/or heavy metals could lead to an unacceptable level of such substance in crab as food.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued***1. INTERPRETATION**

In this Part, unless the contrary intention applies, each word or group of words has the same meaning, if any, as it has in the *Fisheries Management Act 1998* (as amended), except where this differs as provided below: —

“Act” means the *Fisheries Management Act 1998* as amended.;

“Authorised Fisheries Officer” means a fisheries officer as gazetted under Section 48 of the *Fisheries Management Act 1998* as amended;

“Berried” means a female with large egg masses attached under the abdomen during the period of incubation;

“Carapace” means the large non-segmented piece of the hard external shell covering the dorsal and lateral parts of the crab;

“Closed area” means a specific area where no harvesting shall take place as specified by this plan or any local management plan established under the framework of this plan, or any areas as designated by communities using other traditional or legislative instruments;

“Closed season” means a time period when no harvesting shall take place as specified by this plan or any local management plan established under the framework of this plan, or any time closures as designated by communities using other traditional or legislative instruments;

“Co-management” means the process in which NFA will collaborate with resource owners, industry and other relevant stakeholders in sustainably managing the mud crab fishery;

“Commercial Aquaculture” means all commercial aquaculture operations with an annual production of one tonne or more.

“Crablets” juvenile post larval crabs that have yet to obtain sexual maturity, sub-adults;

“Crab Stock” means a discrete breeding population of individual mud crab species belonging to the genus *Scylla*;

“Crab pot” includes a dilly (net), crab pot and any device designed to act as a trap or that may act as a trap for mud crabs;

“Ecosystem-based Management” is an extension of conventional fisheries management recognizing more explicitly the interdependence between human well-being and ecosystem health and the need to maintain ecosystems productivity for present and future generations;

“Fate” means the form in which the crabs are purchased or stored or exported (e.g. live, frozen, or cooked)

“Fishing methods” includes crab pots, baited traps, scoop nets, mangrove hook and mangrove stake used to catch mud crabs;

“Harvesting” means capture, catch or harvesting of mud crabs for commercial purposes;

“Licence” means a licence entitling the licensee to buy, store or export mud crab.

“Licensee” means a person or entity holding a mud crab licence, fish processing and storage facility license, export facility license and aquaculture facility licence;

“License condition” details the regulations that an industry operator must comply with as per this plan or any local management plan established under the framework of this plan;

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*1. Interpretation—*continued*

“License requirements” details the requirements for an industry operator to be issued a licence as per this plan or any local management plan established under the framework of this plan;

“Moulting stage” means the routine casting off of a part of its body (often the outer layer or covering), either at specific times of the year, or at specific points in its life cycle;

“Mud crab” means a crab, or part of a crab of the genus *Scylla* and includes, in relation to a mud crab:

- an egg or larva;
- a dead body or part of a dead body; and
- a shell or exoskeleton or part of a shell or exoskeleton;

“Plan” means the National Mud crab Fishery Management Plan;

“Regulation” means Fisheries Management Regulation 2000 as amended;

“Resources Owner” means an individual, family or clan who have rights or use of mangrove and estuarine areas where mud crabs and other marine resources are harvested;

“Size limit” refers to sizes critical to the population biology of the mud crab species related to its age at first maturity and the reproductive mature size classes;

“Total Allowable Catch (TAC)” means the proportion of the stock that is allowed to be taken out by any one province in any one year;

2. APPLICATION

- a) The National Mud Crab Management Plan is cited as “the Management Plan”.
- b) This Management Plan applies to all species belonging to the genus *Scylla* of the family *Portunidae*.
- c) This Management Plan applies to the mud crab fishery, aquaculture of mud crabs and includes all harvesting and activities associated with the collection, farming, fattening, processing, storage, buying, selling and exporting of mud crabs both as live products, cooked products and processed mud crab products.
- d) The Schedules attached to this Management Plan form part of the Management Plan and shall be read together as part of the plan.
- e) This Management Plan is to be interpreted in conjunction with the *Fisheries Management Act* (as amended) and the Fisheries Regulation.
- f) Words and expressions used in this Management Plan shall have the same meanings as defined in aforementioned Act and the Regulation.
- g) Where there is inconsistency between this Management Plan and Act and the Regulations, the *Fisheries Management Act* (as amended) shall prevail in all instances.
- h) Where there is inconsistency between this Management Plan and any associated Provincial, LLG and community management actions, a hierarchal process of legal standing will apply, e.g., Provincial-level Management Plan will hold precedent over a LLG Management Plan which will hold precedent over a community management plan unless endorsed by the LLG using the Organic Law, or

other legislative instruments, with this Management Plan prevailing overall.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*

3. REVIEW

- a) The Management Plan will be reviewed by the NFA every two years or at such earlier time as the NFA Managing Director or the National Fisheries Board shall direct.
- b) Subject to prior approval from NFA Managing Director or the National Fisheries Board; any review of the Management Plan shall be made public by the NFA and appropriate consultation will be conducted with relevant stakeholders involved in the mud crab fishery and marketing of mud crab.
- c) Review of the Management Plan will include appropriate stakeholder consultation on the issues that affect the effective implementation of the Management Plan and will include any new and updated information on the biology, ecology and fisheries that will inform the Management Plan.

4. OBJECTIVES

- a) To sustainably manage the mud crab fishery for the long-term livelihood benefits of the mud crab resource owners.
- b) To maintain all species of mud crab populations at a biologically sustainable level.
- c) To sustain the economic benefit of the mud crab fishery for the benefit of resource owners and industry.
- d) To enable resource owners, industry, other relevant groups and research institutions in the management of the mud crab fishery.

5. MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

a) Precautionary Approach.

The precautionary approaches to fisheries management will be used to guide the implementation and review of the Management Plan and will take into account the latest scientific and other relevant information is used to refine management actions. Furthermore, in the absence of available data, all management decisions will embrace the precautionary approach for the benefit of the sustainability of the resource and the biological function it plays within the ecosystem.

b) Good Enough

The Good Enough principle will trigger decisions to be made on the management of the mud crab fishery based on the best available scientific and technical data and information at that time. Decisions will be made while working towards further data and information collection to inform management decisions.

c) Ecosystem Approach.

The fishery will be managed using the values, principles and guidelines of ecosystem-based management. This means a holistic approach to management of the mud crab fishery, ensuring that the vital natural habitats supporting the different life history stages of the *Scylla* species are managed/protected.

d) Co-Management

Resource Owners, Industry and other relevant stakeholders will be consulted and involved where appropriate in the sustainable management of the mud crab fishery. The Resource Owners will be directly involved in the day-to-day management of harvesting and related activities in areas that the

traditional resource owners' control.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*

6. MANAGEMENT MEASURES

a) Licensing

i. License Types

Individuals and companies wanting to be involved in purchasing, holding and marketing of mud crabs will require a Buyers Licence, Storage Facility Licence, Fish Factory Licence and Export Facility Licence. Other licences such as the Aquaculture Facility and Hatchery Licences and other types of licences may be required. All Licences are issued for one year and once a licence has expired, the Licensee has to reapply for the licence.

a) Buyers License

A Buyers Licence is required for an individual or business entity who wants to buy mud crabs direct from fishers located in the markets and villages for commercial purposes.

b) Storage Facility Licence

A Storage Facility Licence is required for the storage of mud crabs. A Storage Facility Licence will only be issued if NFA is satisfied that the company has met all licensing conditions and has complied with the conditions of the Management Plan.

c) Export Facility Licence

Companies intending to export mud crabs require an Export Facility Licence as specified under the Regulations. An Export Facility Licence will only be issued to a company that holds a Storage Facility Licence or a Fish Factory Licence.

d) Fish Factory Licence

A company intending to process crab requires a Fish Factory Licence.

ii. Licence Conditions

- a) There shall be a limit on the number of Export licenses and buyers operating in a particular province. The limit on the number of Export Licences will be determined based on the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) allocated for a respective province.
- b) There shall be a limit on the number of Buyers license per exporting company.
- c) All mud crabs collected and purchased from the areas in a particular province will be reported as being from that specific Province. Companies who transfer or sell their mud crab products to another company located in another province must apply for an Inter-provincial Transfer from NFA using the Form in Schedule 3 of the Management Plan.
- d) An Inter-provincial Transfer Form must first, be approved by the NFA Managing Director or his/her alternative before any form of trade takes place.
- e) All licensed exporters must provide their airway bill for every export internationally or for every transfer domestically before the next export or transfer is permitted.
- f) All approved export facility licenses must provide a copy of remittance within a timeframe of 10 working days. Failure to do so will result in the company being penalised.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*6. Management Measures—*continued*a) Licensing—*continued*ii. Licence Conditions—*continued*

- g) Any outstanding remittance must be settled before reapplication for the next licensing period. Failure to do so will result in the application not being considered for the next season.
- h) Once a closure notice has been given for a particular province or nationally in the case of the compulsory seasonal closure, companies must report all holdings of mud crabs or mud crab products to the NFA and the respective Provincial Fisheries Administrations on the Form set out in Schedule 5 of the Management Plan.
- i) In the event that the company is found to be in breach of this plan or the Act and Regulations, penalties of non-compliance is subjected to the penalty provision.
- j) If the company reaches three penalty charges, their licenses will be terminated.

iii. Licence Eligibility

- a) Licenses to participate in the mud crab trade are reserved for PNG citizens only.
- b) Trade of mud crabs are restricted to licensed operators only.

iv. Licensing Requirements

- a) Licensed Exporters and their associated Buyers are required to provide all purchasing data every week, using the Form as set out in Schedule 1 in the Management Plan along with copies of their advertised buying and export prices.
- b) All licence holders may have their licence terminated if they breach licence conditions, as well as any sections of the Management Plan, Act and Regulations.
- c) Licences may be suspended once an investigation is commenced for any infringement with regards to the conditions of the Management Plan, Act and Regulations or if the license holder is involved in any other illegal activities.
- d) Licences may be terminated by the National Fisheries Board if the licensee is found guilty of any offence related to the conditions of the Management Plan, Act and Regulations.
- e) Licenses which are terminated are not eligible for reapplication.
- f) Agreement between local business and financier (either local or foreign) must be provided.

v. Buying and Exporting Requirements

- a) Licensed exporters will only export mud crabs with a carapace width of 12 cm and above. The carapace width measurement is shown in Schedule 6 of the Management Plan.
- b) Buying, possession, export and trade of undersized mud crabs less than 12 cm carapace width is prohibited. Any undersized product will be confiscated, a fine incurred, and cancellation of the licence.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*6. Management Measures—*continued*a) Licensing—*continued*v. Buying and exporting requirements—*continued*

- c) Export of mud crabs will be consistent with the administrative standards set by NFA and other international trade market standards.
- d) Exporters may sell to another exporter in another province under special circumstances as approved by the NFA Managing Director or his/her alternative. The Exporter must use the Inter-Provincial Transfer Permit Form in Schedule 2 of the Management Plan.
- e) Each Licensed company must have a facility in NCD as Port Moresby has the only international export port as well as sub-holding facilities in particular provinces where the company's licensed buyers are operating. A Storage Facility Licence or a Fish Factory Licence is required for these facilities.
- f) Buying and exporting of mud crabs (processed or live) as samples will be limited to not more than 10 kilograms.

vi. License Considerations

- a) A limited number of licences may be reserved for Resource Owners to allow participation in the mud crab business if they are eligible and able to comply with the requirements of the Management Plan.
- b) Resource Owners who are prevented either by belief, culture, tradition, or other legitimate means to eat mud crabs may have the option to sell or give permission for the other users to harvest mud crabs from their area.

b) Fishing Season

- i. The mud crab harvesting season will commence annually on the 01st November and will close on the 30th April or when the TAC for each particular province is reached.
- ii. All licenses will expire when the harvesting season closes on the 30th of April each year.
- iii. All license applications for mud crab harvesting season must be submitted by the 01st of August of each year.

c) Total Allowable Catches (TAC)

i. Calculation and Allocation of TAC

- a) The TAC for the mud crab fishery for each particular province shall be calculated at 50% of the total estimated stock biomass in metric tonnes based on stock assessments conducted by the National Fisheries Authority for that respective province. TACs will be reviewed when updated stock assessments are conducted.
- b) The calculated TAC may be divided and apportioned to each Licensed Exporter and Buyer for

the purpose of exporting.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*

6. Management Measures—*continued*

c) Total Allowable Catches (TAC)—*continued*

i. Calculation and Allocation of TAC—*continued*

- c) When each particular province reaches the allocated TAC, collecting, buying and exporting of mud crabs for that specific province will cease. A notice informing fishers, Licenced Buyers and Licenced Exporters to cease buying and exporting from that particular province will be posted in the media prior to the closure date.

ii. TAC Monitoring

- a) NFA will monitor the TAC in near real time using the daily purchase data Form in Schedule 1 of the Management Plan and through the monitoring of the exports.
- b) Selling of mud crabs to hotels, restaurants and retailers can continue during the export closed season

7. PROHIBITIONS

- a) The harvesting of mud crabs shall be restricted only to Resource Owners employing allowable harvesting methods as detailed in the definitions of the Management Plan.
- b) Buying of mud crabs for the purpose of exporting and the export of mud crabs is prohibited when a particular provincial TAC has been reached.
- c) The harvesting, buying, exporting and trade of mud crabs less than 12 cm carapace width for all species of mud crab is prohibited.
- d) The harvesting, buying, exporting and trade of mud crabs in moult stage is prohibited.
- e) The harvesting, buying, exporting and trade of berried female mud crabs is prohibited. Captured berried female mud crabs must be immediately returned to the body of water or the mud from which they were taken from, with as little injury to the mud crab as possible.
- f) Operators are not permitted to buy or export any other crab species apart from the four *Scylla* species
- g) No other harvesting methods are to be used and/or introduced other than those detailed in the definitions of the Management Plan.

8. COMMERCIAL AQUACULTURE

- a) All commercial crab aquaculture must have a valid Aquaculture License.
- b) All commercial aquaculture operations must source their crablets from the hatchery.
- c) The sourcing of mud crablets from the wild for commercial aquaculture is prohibited.
- d) The importation of mud crab or mud crablets from overseas for aquaculture purposes is prohibited.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*8. Commercial Aquaculture—*continued*

- e) The translocation of mud crabs from the international border provinces (i.e., Western, Sandaun [West Sepik], and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville) for hatchery use must be quarantined.
- f) All commercial mud crab aquaculture operations must comply with regulatory requirements of the Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA) and that National Agriculture and Quarantine Inspection Authority (NAQIA) and any other applicable laws.

9. PERSONAL CONSUMPTION

- a) Mud crabs bound for overseas for personal consumption shall be limited to 10 kilograms (frozen) and requires authorisation from the NFA Audit Certification Unit using the Certificate for Personal Consumption of Fish and Fishery Products.

10. REPORTING

- a) In accordance with the Management Plan, Act and Regulations, licensed mud crab buyers shall submit data on mud crabs purchased (i.e., the number of individual mud crabs and their total weight), as well as the area where the mud crabs were caught, the name of fisher(s), date of receipt and price paid to the NFA on a weekly basis.
- b) A Licensed Exporter shall report to NFA each time mud crabs are to be exported detailing the species, fate, weight (in kilograms) and value. Failure to submit the required reports set out in the sections above by more than ten days or submitting incorrect or false data is an offence.
- c) All Licensed Exporters shall be subject to the PNG Standards for Fish and Fish Products.

11. COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

- a) Community management measures which are consistent with the Management Plan will be encouraged or other relevant legislations under CEPA and the Organic Law. Resource Owners are encouraged to notify the NFA of any such management measures.

12. MONITORING AND RESEARCH

- a) In support of the objective of this Plan, the NFA shall undertake and collaborate in scientific and economic research and monitoring of the mud crab fishery including with other national, international and regional management and science bodies.
- b) NFA may visit license facilities to collect independent data on crab species, sizes, and other scientific and economic information that are necessary to improve the overall management of the mud crab fishery.

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*

SCHEDULE 2. APPLICATION AND APPROVAL FORM TO SELL AND TRANSFER CRABS FROM ONE PROVINCE TO THE OTHER

NATIONAL FISHERIES AUTHORITY

MUD CRAB INTER-PROVINCIAL TRANSFER FORM

Name of Company:..... Export Licence No:.....
 Originating Province:..... Originating Port:..... Port Code:.....
 Receiving Province:..... Receiving Port:..... Port Code:.....
 Receiving Company Name:..... Export Licence Number:.....
 Date Application Lodged:..... Date Received:.....
 Date Products Intended to Move:..... Shipping Method. Ship/Air (Circle)
 Flight Number:..... Shipping Freight Code:.....

Reason for Moving Products:

.....

QUANTITY AT PORT OF ORIGIN (KG)	WEIGHT (G)	TOTAL VALUE (KINA)

Name of Applicant:..... Signature of Applicant:.....

Date:.....

Name of Inspecting Officer at Port of Origin: Signature:.....

Date:.....

Inspecting Fisheries Officers Comment:

.....

Executive Manager Monitoring Control and Surveillance Comment:

.....

.....

.....

Managing Director Approval (Signature): Date:

Inspecting Fisheries Officer at Receiving Port:.....

Signature:

Comment:

.....

.....

National Mud Crab Fishery Management Plan—*continued*

SCHEDULE 5. STANDARD MEASURES FOR THE SIZE RESTRICTIONS TO BE USED IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROVISIONS OF THIS PLAN AND THE *FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ACT*.

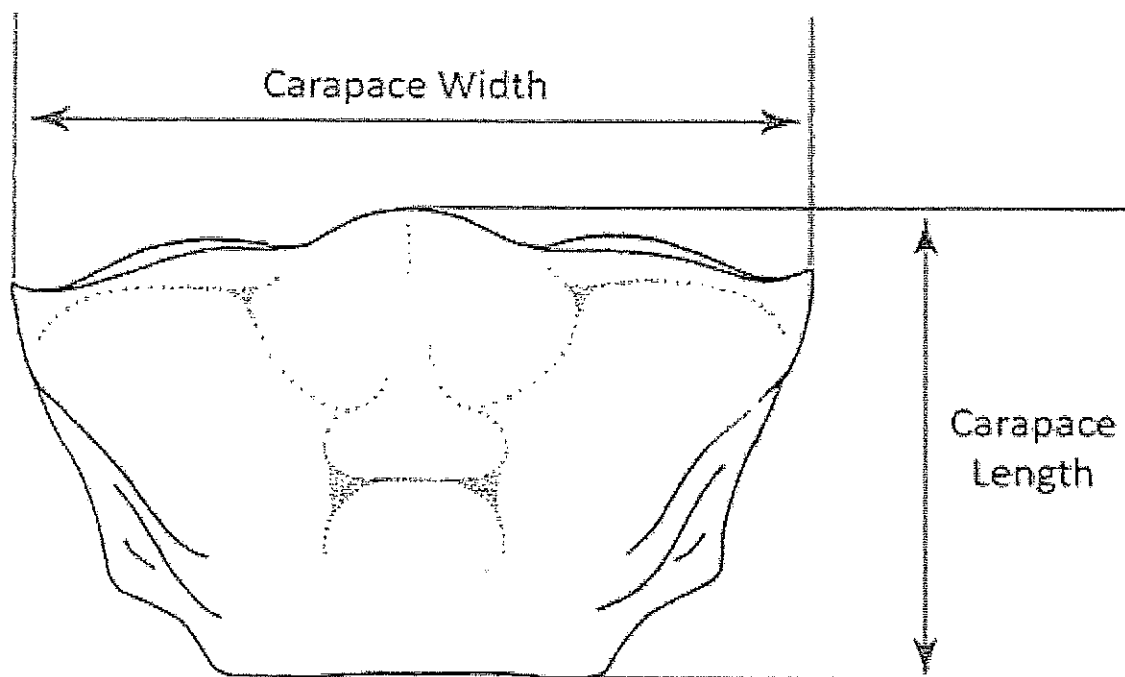
NATIONAL FISHERIES AUTHORITYSIZE LIMITS

Figure 1. Showing carapace width and carapace length measurement

SPECIES	SIZE LIMITS
Scylla serrata	12cm CW
Scylla olivacea	12cm CW
Scylla paramamosain	12cm CW
Scylla tranquabarica	12cm CW

Approved this 1st day of August, 2022.

Hon. Dr L. TOM,
Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources.